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### In the land of the perpetrators

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# In the Land of the Perpetrators: Krystyna Żywulska's Holocaust Memoir and her Migration from Poland to West Germany

Peter Davies

Krystyna Żywulska, born Sonia Landau in 1918 in Łódź, was a popular Polish songwriter and satirist in the two decades after the end of the Second World War, and was the author of a number of autobiographical texts arising from her experiences in the Warsaw underground during the German occupation and her two years in Auschwitz after her arrest in 1943. In 1941, she had been deported with her parents to the Warsaw Ghetto, from which she had escaped with the help of the Polish Home Army; until her arrest, she lived and worked for the resistance under assumed identities as a non-Jewish Pole, and it was as a non-Jew that she was able to survive her time in Auschwitz. In post-war Poland, she worked as a journalist, satirist and songwriter, until 1968, when she left the country with her two sons during the intensely anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Polish communist party in response to the Prague Spring and a series of protests in support of it in Poland. She settled in West Germany, where she stayed until her death in Düsseldorf in 1992.

In Germany, she published her own German versions of a number of her satirical stories, and of her two most substantial literary memoirs, *Przeżyłam Oświęcim* (*I Survived Auschwitz*, which appeared in German in 1979) and *Pusta Woda* (*Empty Water*, 1980), which made little impact. However, just before her death, the German novelist Liane Dierks wrote a lightly fictionalised account of her own encounter with Żywulska, who had retold her story, supposedly finally entrusting Dierks with some details of her experiences in Auschwitz that she had been unwilling to discuss before. In this paper, I will discuss some of the issues that arise in the multiple textual mediation of Żywulska's identity as Holocaust survivor, and explore how a migration of a few hundred kilometres from Poland to West Germany entailed the refashioning of her autobiographical identity in the light of very different assumptions about the Holocaust, Jewish identity, and the nature of female victimhood.

The text that I will focus on here is her Auschwitz memoir, *Przeżyłam Oświęcim*, which was first published in Poland in 1946<sup>1</sup>, and went through several editions, as well as being translated into English by Krystyna Cenkalska in 1951 as *I came back* and into German by the author in 1979 as *Wo vorher Birken waren: Überlebensbericht einer jungen Frau aus Auschwitz-Birkenau* (*Where once there were birch trees: A young woman's report of survival from Auschwitz-Birkenau*). The Polish text is now published through the state museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau, as is the English version, now entitled *I survived Auschwitz* and adapted and edited by Max Bojarski and Katherine Craddy, despite some substantial differences between the texts.<sup>2</sup> *Pusta Woda*, first published in

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<sup>1</sup> Krystyna Żywulska. 1946. *Przeżyłam Oświęcim*. Warsaw, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza "Wiedza". The publication history of the Polish text is complex, but all references are to the most recent edition unless otherwise stated: Krystyna Żywulska. 2008. *Przeżyłam Oświęcim*. Warsaw, tCHu / Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau.

<sup>2</sup> Krystyna Żywulska. 2004. *I Survived Auschwitz*. Translated by Krystyna Cenkalska. Warsaw, tCHu / Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau. The translations of the Polish text are my own, as there are too

1962, and which has only recently been translated into English, is an account of her family, her escape from the Warsaw ghetto under an assumed identity, resistance activities in Warsaw, arrest and interrogation, and *Przeżyłam Oświęcim*, which was written first, recounts the story from her transport to Auschwitz to the moment of liberation.

If we were to sum up the autobiographical structure of the two texts, we could say that *Pusta Woda* is a narrative of the rejection and assumption of identities, while *Przeżyłam Oświęcim* concerns the defense of the narrator's assumed identity at all costs: that the former was written second, and some time after the first, demonstrates a need to explore the archaeology of Żywulska's authorial identity at a moment in postwar Polish history when Jewish Poles were coming under suspicion of lack of patriotism and even treason, and the Polish communist party was seeking to assert control over the definition of heroism and victimhood during the German occupation.

There are one or two slightly differing versions of the story of her adoption of the name Krystyna Żywulska: the most prominent version in her work suggests that she had been living under a variety of assumed names until her arrest, and that she came up with the name that would become her authorial identity in order to protect herself while under interrogation by the Gestapo. This dramatic story is told in the later text, *Pusta Woda*, rather than in *I survived Auschwitz*, which it is possible to read without knowing about her Jewish origins. *Pusta Woda* is labelled a novel, however, so there are questions of genre that we need to be careful of, even though we have no real reason to doubt her story: we should note that this is also a literary, authorial identity created and defended as a trophy of resistance and defiance rather than of victimhood.

There would be more to say about the identity questions that Żywulska's texts raise, but for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in the shifts that occur in translation and in the new opportunities and problems that arose on her migration to West Germany. Although 16 years separates the publication of the two autobiographical texts in Polish, Żywulska made the German translations of the two texts at around the same time, with the result that they interfere with each other in ways that the Polish texts do not: in particular, an extra layer of commentary is added to *Wo vorher Birken waren* that complicates the text's identity discourse by bringing to the surface contradictions and tensions that the Polish text of 1946 had concealed.

The translation shifts enable us to ask questions about different views of what constitutes victimhood and victim testimony in different cultural contexts, and what is expected of texts by victims, looking in particular at the textual constitution of identity. We can ask to what extent the configuration of identity in the texts is a response to explicit external pressures and expectations, and how the author positions herself within and against those expectations.

Żywulska is operating between two quite incompatible 'victim cultures' that bring with them different conceptions of identity: a postwar Polish Stalinist culture that stressed the martyrdom of the nation as a whole, often rejecting the notion that Jews were singled out for special treatment beyond that which other Poles suffered and preferring stories of active resistance to passive victimhood, and a West German society that, when Żywulska arrived there, was in the process of renegotiating its relationship with National Socialism through openness to, and often identification with, the Nazis' Jewish victims.

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many differences between the published Polish and English versions to make it useful for the purposes of this essay.

The difficulty that Żywulska has posed for critics arises from her refusal to conform to Western expectations of a clear post-war victim identity: she never reverted to her birth name, either as an author or in everyday life, an attitude that has been seen as an unwillingness to acknowledge her Jewish background. Henryk Grynberg interprets this as a tragic psychological after-effect of the experience of anti-Semitism: 'There were many cases of Jews who after the war were afraid to admit their Jewishness, especially after such experiences as those Żywulska lived through. But this is perhaps the only known case in which a writer narrating her profoundest personal experiences and the tragedy of her people in the first person conceals her true identity from her readers. This must be considered yet another of the unprecedented tragedies of the Holocaust.'<sup>3</sup>

Grynberg himself went through a similar set of experiences before leaving Poland for the USA in 1967, but his surprise at Żywulska's stance displays an attitude schooled on particular post-Holocaust narratives of trauma and identity: Żywulska's work does not lend itself to reading in this way. Grynberg's view depends on the idea that the autobiographical writer has an obligation to reveal her 'true' identity to the reader, and that Żywulska's attitude should therefore be seen as an act of deception perpetrated on the reader, who is placed in the same position as the Gestapo agents whom she fools: 'She conceals this fact, not only from the Germans, which could be quite understandable, and not only from her fellow-prisoners, which could be also comprehensible, but also from the reader.'

What Grynberg does not acknowledge is the corollary of this, namely that a reading that aims to bring to light the hidden identity in this text positions the reader in an analogous inquisitorial role, equating the 'hidden' with the 'true'. This seems to me to downplay her agency and desire to defend an identity based on authorship, on authority over her own life story, and on resistance to the imposition of identities, including that of the victim. After all, her professional, authorial identity was drawn from her identity as a resister, which was fought for and maintained at extraordinary personal risk. She refuses to adopt the social persona of victim, which would entail a particular account of Jewish identity prioritised over Polishness, and rejects an autobiographical reading of her work in favour of defending the autonomy of her literary-political identity.

Żywulska does not take the opportunity offered by her migration to adopt a confessional, autobiographical narrative that 'reveals' a true identity. She resists the temptation to make a gesture of rejecting the conventions of Eastern Bloc antifascist narratives in favour of the revelation of a 'true' textual identity; after all, this would also entail accepting another set of identity narrative conventions in the new context, which would create the identity in the gesture of its 'revelation'. I would suggest that Żywulska's attitude displays a refusal to conform to imposed identities of any kind, while at the same time recognising that her move to West Germany offers her particular opportunities that were not open to her in Poland.

The publication of *Pusta Woda* explores processes of identity formation that show the complex origins of her authorial identity: her Jewish origins are acknowledged in the process of showing how they were disguised. Her refusal in the West to accept the offer of the clear label of the passive and helpless Jewish Holocaust victim could only be interpreted by Western readers as a sign of the repression of trauma: Żywulska's

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<sup>3</sup> Henryk Grynberg 1979. "The Holocaust in Polish Literature." *Notre Dame English Journal*: 11, no. 2, 115-39 (p. 126).

significant investment in the maintenance of her hard-won self-authorship conflicts with the equally hard-won image of the Jewish Holocaust victim, that had only been established at the centre of West German Holocaust remembrance after years of intense struggle since the 1960s.

Liane Dirks's novelistic account of her relationship with Żywulska in the years before her death demonstrates a desire to construct an identity for Żywulska through the narrative device of coaxing repressed experiences and a 'true' self from the victim. Dirks's narrator plays the role of sympathetic listener trying to reach beneath the surface, bringing to light memories that Żywulska had supposedly been unwilling to discuss before: the novel concludes with a rather voyeuristic 'revelation' about sexual experiences in Auschwitz, that Żywulska had supposedly entrusted to Dirks shortly before her death: 'Es gab eine Nacht. Ich habe es noch nie erzählt, und ich mache es nur einmal' (There was one night. I have never told the story before, and I will only do it once), as the 'Żywulska' character in the story says to the narrator. Dirks's narration of the scene in which a group of male and female prisoners sleep together accompanied by the violin playing of a Hungarian Jew, is of an extraordinary crassness, sentimentalising and depoliticising Żywulska's story through the gesture of revelation of untold memories: 'Es gab nur noch das Lied und sechs nackte Menschen in einer Baracke in Auschwitz in einer Nacht voll Glück. In der sie alles vergaßen, nur die Liebe nicht'<sup>4</sup> (There were only the song and six naked people in a hut in Auschwitz in a night full of happiness. In which they forgot everything, except for love). Here, the gaze of the confessor that brings to light the inmost secrets of identity, coded here in terms of a sexuality that is considered to be universal and beyond politics, creates that identity in the text through the mechanisms of sympathetic listening and the claim to solidarity. The textual 'Żywulska' on display here is an exculpatory creation designed to efface the specificity of the victim experience and Żywulska's own stubborn individuality in order to create common ground with the representative descendant of the perpetrators.

Both this and Greenberg's rather different account of 'repression', which pull Żywulska in different directions, show a desire to depoliticise Żywulska's carefully nurtured identity, in the sense of denying her agency and assuming that her refusal to conform to particular expectations about victimhood can only be explained through processes of repression, rather than by choice. Żywulska's authorial identity is an explicitly political one, formed under very different circumstances during and after the German occupation of Poland.

It was by no means unusual for Eastern Bloc Jewish antifascists to prefer an identity based on their active, political role in the resistance rather than their passive victimhood. There was a complex of reasons for this, including the experience of a wave of anti-Semitic persecution in the early 1950s once the Soviet Party has swung away for its early support for the state of Israel, and during which Jews could be accused of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, Zionism and lack of patriotism; other reasons were the higher status (and financial compensation) granted to antifascist fighters in the post-war east as opposed to victims defined by their Jewishness, and genuine pride in active, patriotic resistance, and a feeling on the part of committed Marxists that cultural and religious identities were a thing of the past. Despite the pressures, there is an aspect of deliberate choice of a

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<sup>4</sup> Liane Dirks 1998. *Und die Liebe? frage ich sie: Die ungeschriebene Geschichte der Krystyna Żywulska*. Zurich: Ammann. 169 and 173.

community of solidarity with which individuals wish to be identified: a deliberate choice, though not a free one.

An active, patriotic resister identity was not denied to Jewish Poles, but the conditions of Stalinism required that they reject their Jewishness, not just by concealing it, but often by explicitly and publicly repudiating it: a dangerous process that entailed drawing attention to what must be rejected. Żywulska was obliged to produce a revised version of *Przeżyłam Oświęcim* in 1951 with a new preface reflecting the political concerns of the time by equating the Nazis with the imperialist enemies of the Soviet Union (Żywulska 1951, 7-8), emphasising her loyalty and engaging in some self-criticism.

There are also passages in the text that demonstrate the tightrope walk necessary for a Jewish writer to create and sustain a patriotic Polish identity. In one particularly striking moment, she introduces a new character, a female Polish Jew, who uses language consonant with the Stalinist view of Jews as ‘rootless cosmopolitans’: ‘I po co mam żyć, dla kogo? Nie mam rodziny. nie mam przyjaciół, nie mam ojczyzny’ (And for what should I live, for whom? I have no family, no friends, I have no native land). Żywulska’s narrator replies: ‘Jak tu nie masz ojczyzny? Twoją ojczyzną jest Polska’ (What do you mean you have no native land? Your land is Poland) (Żywulska 1951, 221; Żywulska 2008, 212). This is followed by a discussion about the possibility of eliminating anti-Semitism in Poland. Directly after this exchange, we learn that that despair has got the better of this ‘homeless’ Jew, and that she has run into the electric wire: her rootlessness means she lacks the patriotic strength needed for resistance, and her suicide indicates that she belongs to the past and has no right to life in the text’s terms. Żywulska must kill the Jew in the text in order to establish her right to and identity as resister and writer: other identities cannot survive.

It is worth acknowledging that Żywulska may have felt that any imposition of an identity of any kind was an act of violence: this might help explain why she was resistant to taking on the role of Jewish victim that was on offer in the West.

### Żywulska’s German translation

When looking at the German text, we are of course dealing with an author-translated text in which choices are made that reflect the conditions of Żywulska’s migration and the need to situate the text within the new context. The new German version of her Auschwitz memoir was published in 1980 with the title *Wo vorher Birken waren: Überlebensbericht einer jungen Frau aus Auschwitz-Birkenau*. The title change is striking, referring to one of the poems that appear in the German text, and which play a significant role in the formation of the autobiographical personality out of political and literary defiance.

In this case, the poem is introduced as an act of defiance also against her fellow prisoners, who are dismissive of the value of poetry. A Polish Jew has brought in a poem by Stanisław Wygodzki, a well-known Polish-Jewish poet who survived Auschwitz and other camps, and, significantly, left Poland at the same time as Żywulska, in his case for Israel. Wygodzki’s poem describes the transport of wood for burning the bodies of the dead, providing an aesthetic means of approaching the reality of the camp, rather than an escape from it. This section of the Polish text—which concludes a chapter—ends with the

objections of Żywulska's friend Czesia, who considers that poetry and music are false in a place where people are burnt:

A ja nie chcę tego słuchać, ja chcę żyć... na wolności będę czytała poezje... tu jest taka straszna proza! Jak będę wolna. przeczytam o miłości, posłucham muzyki. Tu nie chcę [...] sentymentalnych tang pod kominami ani poezji o drzewie, w którym płoną ludzie. (Żywulska 2008, 244)  
(But I don't want to listen to you [reading the poem], I want to live... I'll read poetry in freedom... Here it's such terrible prose! When I'm free, I'll read about love, I'll listen to music. Here I don't want [...] sentimental tangos under the chimneys or poetry about wood that is used to burn people.)

Her statement that the conditions in the camp are prose, rather than poetry, suggests an aesthetic programme of prose realism as opposed to the poetic resistance represented by Wygodzki, whose works are dismissed here. Wygodzki's Jewishness is not mentioned here, though he was known as a Jewish writer, but the poem is smuggled in by a Jewish prisoner and dismissed, along with Żywulska's objections, by the non-Jew Czesia, who is given the last word.

The German edition reverses this dynamic. Czesia's words are similar, except that the statement about prose is missing:

Ich will das aber nicht hören, ich will leben. Wenn ich wieder frei bin, werde ich Gedichte lesen. Hier will ich weder [...] den sentimentalen Tango unter den Schornsteinen noch Gedichte über Holz hören, mit dem Menschen verbrannt werden! (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 227)  
(But I don't want to hear that, I want to live. When I'm free again, I'll read poems. Here I don't want to hear [...] the sentimental tango under the chimneys or poems about wood that's used to burn people.)

Following this, she writes: 'Trotzdem schrieb ich damals folgende Verse' (Despite this, I wrote the following verses), and cites the poem 'Birkenau', from which the text's title is taken: 'Vorher waren hier Birken, | und wahrscheinlich deswegen | einfach—Birkenau | heißt jetzt diese Gegend' (There were birch trees here before and probably just for that reason, this place is called Birkenau. Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 228). Her 'trotzdem' is the key here: she writes in defiance not just of oppression and violence, but also of her fellow prisoners, for whom poetry is pointless.

Taking the poem's opening for the title of her text puts the emphasis clearly on the defense of the authorial personality 'Krystyna Żywulska', as well as on the author's physical survival; at the same time, however, Żywulska 'smuggles in' a validation of the work of the Jewish writer Wygodzki, reflected textually in the way that his poem is smuggled in by a Jewish prisoner, as a coded way of talking about her own complex identity as a Polish-Jewish writer. Since none of the published Polish editions, including the earliest, include this poem, it is clear that we are dealing with a new insertion for the German publication. As I will show, this change of emphasis in the way the German text encodes identity reflects the strategies that Żywulska adopts in order to place her autobiographical text within the new German context.

The German title does, however, downplay the literary ambitions of the text. The word 'Bericht' suggests an objective, evidence based account rather than a literary autobiography, which replaces the active process of survival suggested by the original title: the title suggests that the text is now about survival, rather than resistance. The

opening up of West German society to the experiences and voices of the victims of genocide and occupation has had the seemingly paradoxical effect that texts dealing with victimhood, persecution and survival are easier to sell than those that deal with resistance to the German occupation. It was easier for the West German left-liberal political culture to constitute its own reflection on the Holocaust around identification with passive victims of a monstrous SS than with those who offered violent resistance to one's own father or grandfather as part of an occupying army. It also seems easier to confront and identify with the suffering of a victim stripped of all individuality and dignity than to deal with the sometimes uncomfortable motivations of individuals who resisted in various ways: nationalism, communism, strong religious faith, desire for vengeance, bloodlust, etc.

Żywulska migrates from a culture where patriotic resistance is validated to one where naked survival is the key image—she has to make certain compromises, but remains remarkably stubborn in her own insistence on defending her identity against those who would make different claims for it. I am going to explore some of the strategies that Żywulska employs in *Wo vorher Birken waren* to position the text for her new intended readership, showing how they complicate the identity that the text projects, while intervening in some German controversies over the interpretation of the Holocaust; the text gains extra layers of commentary, reflecting the new situation, but also begins to speak against itself in telling ways.

The collective with which the narrator identifies in Żywulska's memoir is the group of non-Jewish Polish women with whom she is captured, and whose support is vital for her survival, despite their occasional political differences. This group of named individuals is differentiated from the mass of women prisoners amongst whom they live through their shared solidarity, defiance and gallows humour; the prisoners who do not belong to this group are for the most part an anonymous mass of hungry, demanding bodies. The female guards are also given names and personalities, but Żywulska tends to refer to Jewish prisoners that they encounter as 'eine Jüdin', stressing their difference. It is as if the text is still repeating the act of distancing and concealment that Żywulska's survival depended on.

Żywulska presents herself as the moral and emotional centre of the collective, which is characterised by a series of points of defiance: they are determined to preserve a sense of their femininity against the 'unfeminine' behaviour of the guards and the temptation to let oneself go and become like the most downtrodden prisoners. Gallows humour is used to hit back at those moments when their identity is under threat; and possibly to cut against reader expectations of the language of victimhood and suffering. And Żywulska takes comfort within the collective in prayer and communal singing, and the 'outside world' is associated in a telling sequence with the sound of the Catholic evening prayer heard through the walls of Pawiak prison in Warsaw. (Żywulska 2008, 12; *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 12)

There is nothing in the Polish text that disrupts this collective identity: it is tested to destruction in Auschwitz, but survives. Żywulska shows herself able to mediate between her Polish fellow-prisoners and the guards, since she understands German: this marks her out as a member of the intelligentsia, for which she is abused by the more bestial guards, who are clearly resentful of her status. An understanding of her background, which the text does not offer us, might suggest that this is an encoded reference to her knowledge of Yiddish, which would allow her to communicate with German-speakers.



The German text, however, is disrupted by a footnote near the beginning, which throws everything into confusion by importing information from her later text into the earlier narrative. Beginning as the kind of informative footnote that explains an aspect of the working of the camp for the uninitiated reader—a very common device in the editing of victim testimonies—it goes on to introduce a piece of key biographical information that is so striking and unlike anything else in the text that it alters the experience of reading abruptly. When discussing the system of coloured triangles that define the category of prisoner that an individual belongs to, Żywulska writes:

Auch ich trug einen roten Winkel, denn ich war als politische Gefangene vom Pawiak nach Auschwitz gekommen [...] Daß ich Jüdin war, war der Gestapo nicht bekannt—und nur das hätte genügt, um liquidiert zu werden. Den Namen Krystyna Żywulska [sic] habe ich übrigens mir erst beim Verhör ausgedacht. (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 15)

(Even I wore a red triangle, as I had come to Auschwitz from Pawiak as a political prisoner [...] The Gestapo didn't know that I was Jewish—and that would have been enough for me to be liquidated. Incidentally, I only came up with the name Krystyna Żywulska at my interrogation.)

This is an extraordinarily dramatic moment, made all the more striking by the fact that it is confined to a footnote and subsequently never mentioned again: the mock casualness of the word 'übrigens' suggest that Żywulska is well aware of the shock effect of her words.

What this footnote suggests is that we should read the identity presented to us in the text, and which is defended tenaciously as a form of collective identification and as a foundation for self-assertion as a human being against an all-out assault on her humanity, as an elaborate deception or mimicry, a performance that fools the guards, her companions, and the reader of the original Polish text. The footnote brings this level of mimicry to our attention, but keeps the text intact, allowing us to admire the performance without providing space for a different form of identity to be proposed. Despite the disruption of the text's identity narrative, Żywulska has too much invested in her literary identity to abandon it.

This can lead to strange textual effects: a few pages on from the footnote, Żywulska describes the moment at which she received the tattoo with her prisoner number, an experience that is usually figured in survivor accounts as an attack on individuality and humanity. So it is here: 'Von diesem Augenblick an hatte ich aufgehört, ein Mensch zu sein. Ich hörte auf zu fühlen, zu denken. Ich besaß keinen Namen, keine Adresse mehr. Ich war Häftling Nr. 55908' (From this moment on I had ceased to be a human being. I ceased feeling, thinking. I possessed no name, no address any more. I was prisoner number 55908. Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 17).

In effect, the process of becoming a number effaces the name that has already effaced her Jewish identity: figuring the tattooing of prisoners as an attack on their common humanity seems to conceal a much more specific act of disappearance on the part of the Jewish victim. The German text exposes the act of effacement without taking it back; it acknowledges the different reception context without becoming assimilated to it.

Later in the text, Żywulska recounts a moment of crisis when she has been detailed to work at Auschwitz-Birkenau and witnesses the operation of the gas chambers at first hand. In order to preserve her sanity, she repeats her name to herself, anchoring her identity, individuality and humanity: '“Nur jetzt nicht verrückt werden,” sagte ich laut zu mir selbst, “Mir geht es gut, ich habe das Fleckfieber hinter mir, heiße Krystyna Żywulska, meine Nummer...” widerholte ich immerfort' (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken*

waren, 128). This is interesting if one is aware that it is a name designed to disguise her Jewish background: insisting on this name comes to seem less like a defiant assertion of her individuality than a desperate defense of her assumed identity. On a textual level, it serves to distance her thoroughly from the Jewish victims that she has seen going to their death. This is a moment in which the act of mimicry becomes very troubling, and the German version, with its early revelation about the politics of naming in the text, begins to show some telling tension; these small moments when the text speaks against itself and holes appear in her identity performance tell us a lot about the situation in which Żywulska found herself between incompatible views of victimhood and identity.

Other textual features indicate a level of engagement with the West German context, and a desire to use her text to intervene in particular debates and controversies, in parallel with the main narrative. In some instances, passages are omitted, such as the discussion about the nationality of the Jewish prisoner and Polish anti-Semitism that I cited above: the passage may have allowed German readers to direct their attention away from the text's attack on Nazi brutality by suggesting that Poles also bore responsibility. The German reader is given no space for self-exculpation.

I will discuss two further footnotes, which engage with particular aspects of the West German discussion, in particular with aspects of camp nomenclature. In the first, Żywulska comments on the mention of the word 'Krematorium' in this sentence: 'Ja, die Schwerkranken werden genauso ins Krematorium eingewiesen' (Yes, the seriously ill are taken to the crematorium just like the others). Her note says this:

Gaskammer und Krematorium waren in *einem* Gebäudekomplex untergebracht. Auf ihrem Weg ins Gas mußten sich die Häftlinge vor dem Krematorium aufstellen. Für die Lagerinsassen selbst bedeutete der Begriff Krematorium lediglich der Ort, wo man den Tod fand, nicht ausschließlich Verbrennungsanlage. (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 34)

(Gas chamber and crematorium were located in *one* complex of buildings. On their way to the gas, the prisoners had to line up in front of the crematorium. For the camp inmates themselves the term crematorium meant simply the place where one met death, not just a place for burning bodies.)

This is an intervention against Holocaust denial, specifically against the view of deniers like Robert Faurisson, who niggles away at terminological inexactitude in order to try to show that there were no gas chambers. Inmates often referred simply to crematoria rather than gas chambers, meaning the location where the mass killing took place: on occasion, translators of texts have replaced 'crematorium' with 'gas chamber', in order to clarify the terminology for the readers, a decision that deniers have interpreted as deliberate falsification. Here, Żywulska intervenes implicitly on behalf of fellow-translators and of the truthfulness of the text.

The second note appears in a complex situation in which Żywulska composes poetry as a way of passing the time and of holding on to some human feeling in a desperate situation; the poems are passed around orally by her fellow prisoners, until they reach the ear of a prisoner, called Wala, with the power to help her. Żywulska writes: '[Wala] begann sich dafür zu interessieren und fragte nach dem Verfasser. Sie fand mich—einen wehmütigen, kahlen "Muselman"' (Wala began to be interested [in the poetry] and asked about the author. She found me—a melancholy, shaven-headed 'Muselman'). Her footnote at this point states: 'In der Lagersprache wurde der abgehärmteste und dreckigste Häftling 'Muselman' genannt. Im Lager machte man sich keine Gedanken über die Herkunft dieses Wortes (In the camp language the most wasted away and filthiest prisoner

was called a 'Muselman'. In the camp, nobody gave a thought to the origin of the word. Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 65). The earlier Polish texts do not work with footnotes, and so the term 'muzułman' is left unexplained.<sup>5</sup> The 2008 edition, which includes a footnote apparatus explaining camp terminology, has a much briefer note on 'muzułman': 'Więzień skrajnie wyniszczony pod względem fizycznym i psychicznym, bezwolny i nastawiony fatalistycznie' (A prisoner extremely wasted away in both a physical and psychological sense, fatalistic and lacking willpower. Żywulska 2008, 63). It is clear, therefore, that the note has been added to the German edition as a means to help position the text in its new context.

The term 'Muselman', which was Auschwitz camp slang for a prisoner who was so worn down that he or she had lost any willpower or desire beyond the stilling of hunger, is potentially sensitive due to its racial overtones. There is no compelling explanation as to the origin of the term at Auschwitz—different slang terms came into use in other camps—but Żywulska's note demonstrates sensitivity to the political context of the new version of her text, and acts here to anticipate and neutralise potential criticism. What is really unusual about this moment is that it is the only time that I can recall in which the narrator of a survivor text refers to him/herself as a 'Muselman': normally this term is used to refer to those who have given up and are doomed to die, and the survivor account will emphasise a positive decision not to become like that. By contrast, Żywulska's story recounts a rescue from this state by an outsider's intervention brought about by her literary talent. Wala represents the text's construction of a desired reader: one who ensures that Żywulska survives because of her talent, and who thus secures the primacy of the active, resisting, authorial identity over the passive, suffering Jewish victim identity.

The parallel story of the text's positioning in the German context, which is told in the footnotes, adds an extra layer of complexity to the text: the plentiful notes in the 2008 Polish edition are there to support understanding of the text itself, rather than to provide a different view of it or to construct a parallel story, as do the German notes. In particular, they explain the many German terms and phrases used by the inmates and guards, and which Żywulska quotes directly in her text in order to demonstrate the particular linguistic situation that she found herself in, and to demonstrate her skill in negotiating her way through it as part of her survival strategy.

Żywulska's German version makes no effort to signal the alienness of these German phrases in the text: they are simply assimilated into the flow of the German narrative, whereas in the Polish text they are markers within the text itself of foreign occupation, linguistic violence, and concepts that are imposed from outside. The result is a text that reads more smoothly, without a sense of the way that the prisoners' language has been colonised by that of the oppressors.

Żywulska describes being hit by a female Kapo for asking too many questions. On asking the Kapo why she hit her, Żywulska receives the reply: 'Because you are impertinent'. Żywulska's Polish text uses the German word 'frech'—'Bu jesteś *frech*' (Żywulska 2008, 38)—drawing attention to the foreign word. The German text cannot indicate this linguistic situation easily, and simply naturalises the sentence: 'Weil du frech bist' (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 39). Something important has gone missing here: the Polish Kapo's use of the German word is significant, since the idea of 'Jewish

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<sup>5</sup> The 1946 edition has 'muzułmanin' (Żywulska 1946, 54), reflecting the German feminine ending; this has been altered to 'muzułman' in the later editions.

impertinence' (jüdische Frechheit) was a standard cliché of anti-Semitic discourse, and the Kapo's words make it clear that her language and attitudes have been infected or colonised by those of the SS. The fact that the Kapo is not aware that Żywulska is Jewish simply indicates that, for her, all the prisoners fall into the category 'sub-human'; for the reader, it is more complex.

However, the German shows different kinds of linguistic sensitivity. For example, the word 'aryjka' ('Aryan' in the feminine form) is used casually by the Polish prisoners—Jewish and non-Jewish alike—to refer to non-Jews as a group that is treated differently from the Jewish prisoners: the prisoners have here taken on the language of Nazi racial categories, using it uncritically because it reflects the way they experience how the camp is organised. The German text places the German equivalent, 'Arierin', in scare quotes (Żywulska, *Wo vorher Birken waren*, 35), reflecting the sensitivity over such language in the German context: this feature of Żywulska's German text displays a self-consciousness about the effects of language that isn't shown by the original.

## Conclusion

The text works at the level of defence of identity, indicating that it is about an authorial identity fought for and preserved not only during the occupation but also after: salvation from the worst moments tends to depend on the effects of her poetry on others, ie., on making a name as a writer under conditions that aim to destroy the individuality of prisoners. But the identity that is being defended here is not a 'true', 'inner' identity constituted by the victim-defining gaze of others, but is a complex textual performance that she calls 'Krystyna Żywulska', a political and public identity based on the unity of literary production and resistance to tyranny: the text now reveals some of the archaeology of that identity, but refuses to abandon it.

The authorial identity in her German text draws attention to its own constructedness while still refusing to abandon it and accept the offer of an identity based on inevitable victimhood rather than resistance. Rather than rewriting her story using the generic markers of trauma or repression, Żywulska makes a conscious decision to engage with the new cultural situation, without abandoning the political authorial identity that she had fought for. The stresses and contradictions in the coding of identity in the German text are a reflection of the difficulty of the task: if it is read with an eye for the conditions of the text's translation and mediation, it can be seen to reflect the conditions, possibilities and tensions of her migration to the land of the perpetrators.